

and Ryman in a far more sustained and directed manner than we have previously had the chance to, what better format than the monograph?

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*Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*. Judith Butler. London: Verso, 2009. 193 pages.

Contemporary war, and the “cultural modes of regulating affective and ethical dispositions through a selective and differential framing of violence” (1), is the focus of Judith Butler’s most recent work *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Butler’s premise that “specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living” (1) intervenes within contemporary epistemological and ontological arguments that inform framing, power, and being. In five essays, Butler systematically and convincingly engages the “frames” of war through her combination of Hegelian philosophy, a neo-Marxist conception of ideology, and post-structuralism.

*Frames of War* propels the strengths of her earlier works such as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). Butler’s analysis clearly builds from the 2004 publication, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, in which she discusses forms of vulnerability, aggression, retaliation, and violence instigated by the Bush administration post-September 11, 2001.

Precariousness is presented as an obligation imposed upon us, and as such, it also serves to mark a series of conditions that allow us to apprehend a life. In the introductory chapter, “Precarious Life, Grievable Life,” attention is drawn to certain epistemological frames that govern “being” and how “being” is therefore constituted within operations of power. It is here she situates reflections upon the iteration and reiteration of norms that govern subjects, and, extending *Gender Trouble*, the ontology that governs the body. Those norms, in combination with the concept of “recognition” stemming from Hegelian texts, offer new insight into how apprehension and recognizability shape subjects. Such a reading centralizes personhood

and the shifting schemes of intelligibility.

In Chapter 1, "Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect" Butler demonstrates that contested notions of personhood do exist: those constructed through histories of life and histories of death. We are shown there is no life and also no death without a relation to some available frame. This is not to say one cannot live or die outside of frames, but, rather, that our apprehension of the precariousness of life is governed by them. Butler's analysis of the ontological fields that govern recognition attends to normativity, and how lives are disciplined by these norms. That one cannot apprehend a life as livable or grievable if it were not first apprehended as living is both the crux of her argument and the function of framing, and it is supplied by the interrogation of being and recognizability. Butler suggests that what underlies this apprehension is that which guides interpretation and recognition. The "frame" is questioned through analysis of war photographs as those which "break out" of the frame "or break from" the frame, like the case of the digital images from Abu Ghraib circulated across the Internet. Framing is presented here as both reflexive and visual; it is not simply a concept, but also a process.

In the following chapter, "Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag," Butler further considers images through the work of Susan Sontag. Adapted from an essay originally published in 2005 by Publications of the Modern Language Association of America PMLA "Photography, War, Outrage," this chapter offers an analysis of the ethics of photography. The phenomenon of embedded reporting and Susan Sontag's final book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), are the objects through which she conducts her analysis. Specifically, she discusses the ways suffering is presented to us through mandated visual images and how such forms of presentation affect our recognition of suffering. The visual and textual images read as signs of humanness or precariousness, and, as such, the suffering of those in the degrading and humiliating photographs require recognition. Acts of recognition break and interrupt the grand narratives that surround war and represent victims.

In what is arguably the strongest chapter, "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time," Butler expounds on the interrelations of sexual politics and minority rights by examining the specific case of the Dutch civic integration exam. For The Netherlands, cultural and political modernity is represented by sexual freedom, which consequently forces those freedoms to compete against cultural

anxieties propelled by the recent tide of Islamic immigration. Integration and acceptance become contested symbols exploited by Right-wing politicians to bleed together dialogues of minority sexual rights (rights granted to gays and lesbians) and Muslim immigration in order to position attitudes against either. Cultural, political, and religious differences are central to Dutch politics, given the murders of the right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2002 and 2004 respectively. Sexual politics and secularism are deployed to tangle this debate by positioning such freedoms as beacons of modernity, and using incompatibilities to enforce exclusions. Butler effectively underscores how the framing of such issues, as well as the power of representation and ideology, are used to delimit legal recognition.

“Non-Thinking in the Name of the Normative,” the fourth chapter, addresses judgments and cultural practices through a consideration of subject positions. Cultural subjects and sexual subjects are used to show the limitations of the normative subject and how we can break free from notions of their incompatibilities. Recognition, subject positions, sexual and religious practices, and bodies allow an understanding of how we can rethink the subject “as a dynamic set of social relations” (162). Critical practices of interrogation allow us to break free of frameworks used to create, maintain, and promote the subject as well as identities.

In the concluding chapter, “The Claim of Non-Violence,” Butler considers non-violence through the lens of psychoanalysis. Here, many of the themes and concepts nascent in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) appear and evolve. Non-violence is not read as a principle but rather as a claim one makes to another (or, recalling the work of Emmanuel Levinas, as an appeal). Our ability to respond to violence and the struggle with non-violence is found not in claims against individuals or groups, but rather in social ontology. A relational social ontology forwarded by Butler offers a break in the frames through which we consider “fear and rage, desire and loss, love and hatred, to name a few” (184). The analysis here offers a new frame in which we can understand the “frames of war,” and by which self-reflexivity and non-acting advance a new way of resistance and equality.

*Frames of War* offers fresh insight into ethical responsiveness and political interpretation within the context of contemporary warfare. Butler clearly and concisely expresses a common-sense approach to understanding some of the most topical issues today. The compelling arguments made offer fresh thinking on narrativized

power relations but also how these relations are framed and structured in relation to critically reading visual imagery and visual culture. This might be her most relevant work to date not only for her followers in the academe but also for those with interest in exploring the discourses of war that penetrate the everyday.

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**Daniel Miller.** *The Comfort of Things*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008. 302 Pages.

Anthropologist Daniel Miller is recognized for his innovative studies of material culture and consumption, outlined in his 1987 publication *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* and developed through more recent works such as his 2005 edited anthology *Materiality*. Though driven by the same mode of inquiry, his new work *The Comfort of Things* departs from what Miller regards as his “usual academic tone” in its presentation of short narrative “portraits” of thirty individuals all living on a single London street that he calls “Stuart Street.” The portraits, presented as distinct chapters, were gathered as part of a larger study of 100 households conducted with graduate student Fiona Parrott to investigate the ways material objects help people deal with loss and change; the results of their investigation are forthcoming. “In the meantime,” Miller writes, “it seemed that the richness of our encounter could lend itself to a different genre of writing—one intended to share our experience with a much wider readership and also to introduce more generally the branch of anthropology I teach: material culture studies” (300).

*The Comfort of Things* indeed functions both as an accessible introduction to Miller’s methodology and a demonstration of how one can learn about people through the medium of their things. As part of Miller’s promotion of material culture studies alongside more traditional branches of anthropology, Miller prepares readers by discussing the limitations of using conventional interviews to learn about people’s lives. People usually present a carefully constructed script for such interviews, he writes, one that is often defensive and restrictive and doesn’t yield much useful information. To avoid relying on these unreliable narratives, Miller and Parrott asked